



Iowa Afterschool Alliance 2008 Policy Agenda

What is Afterschool?

Afterschool programs provide experiences that are meaningful and beneficial to children, youth, families, and communities by offering safe, engaging, and enriching environments for children and youth when they are not in school. Quality afterschool programs utilize a youth development philosophy that incorporates the strengths and assets of youth to build their skills and broaden their experiences. Afterschool programs not only assist youth with academic issues, but help them develop career paths and volunteer opportunities, build social skills, and become civically engaged, as well as providing preventive, gender-specific, and other specialized programming. These ongoing, continuous programs occur before school, after school, in the evenings, weekends, school and other breaks, school in-service days, or for late starts or early dismissals. They can be offered by a school, by a contractor with a school, by a community-based organization, or other partnerships at a school or other location. These programs might also be referred to as "extended learning opportunities," "out-of-school" programs, or "enrichment" programs.

Youth development is a combination of all of the people, places, supports, opportunities, and services that young people need to be happy, healthy, and successful.

(From the Center for Youth Development Policy and Research)

The Current State of Afterschool

The state has made incredible advances in supporting afterschool in Iowa with a first-ever appropriation in 2006 and increased funding in 2007, totaling \$1 million, to fund high quality, affordable programs that provide a safe place and engaging activities for youth. That funding has provided support for innovative programs that not only assist students with academic issues, but help them develop career paths and volunteer opportunities, build social skills, and become civically engaged.

The programs in 2006 alone helped over 1100 kids improve their academic achievement and broaden their experiences in their communities and schools. Afterschool participants in Clinton utilized job shadowing programs, while in Des Moines students were able to use an Intensive Career Exploration curriculum. In six separate school districts throughout North Central Iowa, Kids Club afterschool sites beautified their communities, collected canned goods for local food pantries, and distributed care packages to U.S. soldiers stationed in Iraq.

In addition, the 2006 funded afterschool programs:

- Improved student achievement in math and reading – according to teachers in Clinton, more than 80% of students improved academically.
- Improved school attendance – in Des Moines, afterschool participants attended school 94% of the time.
- Increased positive behavior and self-confidence – at Kids Clubs sites throughout North Central Iowa, more than 80% of kids in the program maintained or increased positive self-perception and positive relationships with adults.
- Gave parents a safe place to leave their children when out of school – the vast majority of parents – 98 to 100% - would recommend the programs to other families.

Requests for funding for the 2007 appropriation totaled \$4 million – more than four times the actual funding available. In a 2007 professional development survey conducted by the Iowa School Age Care Alliance, current afterschool programs indicated that funding and grant opportunities are a significant and ongoing concern for them. Iowa, unlike many states, relies heavily on parents to fund before and afterschool programs – families pay approximately two-thirds of the cost of afterschool programming in Iowa. The only alternative for many families who cannot afford afterschool programming is to leave their children home alone. According to the 2006 Iowa Youth Survey, 73% of 6th graders and 85% of 8th graders say they spend at least one to four hours unsupervised each day. And the reality for most programs in Iowa is that without access to a sustainable, ongoing funding source, programs are continually struggling to keep the doors open, provide new opportunities, outfit their students with proper supplies, hire appropriately trained staff, and meet the needs of their communities.

IAA's Recommendations

Expand state funding to \$6 million and provide a sustainable and flexible resource for afterschool programming

In 2007, thirty eight programs requested over \$4 million in funds and only nine were funded. Many more programs reported not applying for these funds because summer programs were ineligible and/or staff resources to respond with an application were limited. The IAA recommends building increased flexibility and sustainability into current afterschool funding by:

- Identifying a single sustainable source and allowing for non-reversion of funds. Multi-year funding would not only provide a more dependable funding stream, it would make much-needed summer programs eligible to apply since the grants have typically been awarded on a nine-month, school year timeframe.
- In addition, the IAA strongly supports strengthening quality programs by requiring professional development for providers and encouraging partnerships with schools to develop joint training for school and afterschool staff. Professional development may include trainings in leadership development, community engagement, critical thinking, problem solving, and career counseling.

Designate 25% of funds to support development of afterschool programs for middle and high school youth to increase high school graduation rates and youth preparedness for college and the workforce

Most communities in Iowa have a significant lack of afterschool opportunities for youth in middle school and high school. Corporate Voices for Working Families estimates that parents' average work week outlasts their children's school week by as much 25 hours. These hours are a prime opportunity not only to keep older youth out of harm's way, but to develop their academic and work readiness skills to prepare them to be productive citizens and future leaders. Given Iowa's demographics and increasing employer skill requirements, it is estimated that Iowa will have over 150,000 more jobs than qualified workers to fill them by 2012 (Meeting Iowa's Workforce Challenge, Iowa Works Campaign, 2006). Though Iowa has an average high school graduation rate of nearly 90%, some school districts continue to struggle. For

instance, the Council Bluffs school district has a graduation rate of approximately 68%, and virtually no afterschool opportunities for youth older than elementary age.

The IAA suggests eligible older youth programs would need to demonstrate significant engagement of community partners and a comprehensive scope of supports beyond academic assistance, such as basic work skills, career development and exploration, college preparation, character development, mentoring, service learning opportunities, prevention, and gender-specific programming,

Create a Transportation Assistance Fund

Transportation is a significant issue for afterschool programs, particularly those in rural parts of the state. Compounding the issue is a recent move by many insurance companies to stop insuring 12-15 passenger vans commonly used by afterschool programs. Although school and city buses are sometimes used to transport kids to afterschool programs, the availability and cost to afterschool programs varies by district. A typical program often transports students between school and the before/afterschool site, and transports them home at the end of the day. The IAA recommends creation of a \$500,000 Transportation Assistance Fund to supplement transportation financing already secured by eligible programs. The assistance would be available to programs identifying a need and demonstrating a concerted effort in seeking partnership and other financial support from school, city, and community partners.

Repeal SILO and Create Statewide Penny

The School Infrastructure Local Option (SILO) sales tax has been approved and is currently being administered in all 99 of Iowa's counties. Twenty-two counties have extended the SILO, and no extension votes have failed. The creation of a statewide penny tax to replace the SILO would create a permanent funding source that would improve education, provide an alternative to property taxes for school infrastructure and technology, and treat all students and taxpayers fairly regardless of where they live. The IAA supports this effort because of the significant impact a sustainable source of funding can have on the infrastructure and educational supports offered by school districts and community education.